

High School Lesson 1

Quote #1

Lincoln said:

“Most governments have been based, practically, on the denial of equal rights of men, as I have, in part, stated them: ours *began* by affirming these rights. They said, some men are too *ignorant*, and *vicious*, to share in government. Possibly so said we; and by your system, you would always keep them ignorant and vicious.

“If A. can prove, however conclusively, that he may, of right, enslave B.—why not may B. snatch the same argument, and prove equally that he may enslave A.?

“You say A. is white and B. is black. It is *color*, then; the lighter having the right to enslave the darker? Take care, by this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet with a skin fairer than your own.

“You do not mean color exactly?—You mean the whites are intellectually the superior of the blacks, and, therefore, have a right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet with an intellect superior to your own . . .”

- What is Lincoln arguing against in this passage?
- How does Lincoln see the United States government as fundamentally different from other governments in history?
- How does Lincoln’s argument support equal rights for all citizens?

Abraham Lincoln, “Fragments on Slavery,” April 1, 1854.